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V CORPS INFANTRY TASK FORCE TRAINING IRAQI SECURITY FORCES TO KEEP UPCOMING ELECTIONS SAFE

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TIKRIT, Iraq — Soldiers of V Corps' Task Force 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry have been working to help keep Iraq's upcoming elections secure, and are now completing a comprehensive training program with their counterparts in Iraqi National Guard and Iraqi National Police organizations in their area of operations.



COURTESY 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION

Iraqi National Guard soldiers conduct a training scenario aimed at helping to keep the country's upcoming elections secure. Soldiers of V Corps' Task Force 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry are working with the ING units and Iraqi police to prepare for possible attacks on the election.

Task force officials say that by New Year's Eve, the 201st ING Battalion will be trained and certified by Task Force 1-18 to conduct platoon-sized operations, and the INP will all have conducted police skills training validation and weapons qualification for their more than 600 local officers here.

Companies in the task force conducted basic rifle marksmanship training with Iraqi security forces members at Forward Operating Bases Omaha and Danger this month.

"Each of our companies in Task Force 1-18 have ING platoons and INP stations associated with them," explained Capt. Mark Wanish, the officer in charge of overseeing the task force's interaction with Iraqi security forces. "The companies are responsible for training these counterpart units ... It allows us to develop a long-term relationship with the Iraqi leadership, which helps (us) work together better in the streets."

Once they have verified the Iraqi soldiers' marksmanship skill, task force Soldiers expanded the training with close-quarters marksmanship and battle training. Starting in the classroom, they trained Iraqi soldiers on room- and building-clearing procedures. Following classroom training, the Iraqi troops returned to the range for reflexive fire training. Later they proved their newfound skills with practical exercises in realistic training scenarios in the community, south of Tikrit.

To certify that the platoons are capable of independent operations, the task force tested each platoon, with senior sergeants and officers judging their performance. The test consisted of collective platoon tasks such as preparing and issuing orders; preparing for combat; operating traffic checkpoints; conducting platoon raids and attacks, and convoy operations.

Task force officials said they conducted the testing publicly to let area residents -- and would-be insurgents -- see the ING soldiers' proficiency.

Key to election security, officials add, is the ability to make ING and ING members capable of securing the elections together.

"The elections are going to happen, and it is our number-one mission to see that they are secure," said Wanish.

The task force has also focused on training the Tikrit Joint Coordination Center to accomplish this goal. Task force members observed a recent emergency response exercise at the voter registration site in Tikrit, that operated on the scenario of a pair of suicide bombers attempting to smuggle bombs into the registration center.

"The INP did very well during the exercise. I think had this been the real deal, they would have defeated the terrorists," said Wanish. Iraqi police guarding the site detected the role-playing insurgents before they were able to inflict any casualties. The JCC coordinated emergency response services to dispose of the demolitions, secure the site and transport the simulated prisoners. This was the first of several drills aimed specifically at election security.

Soldiers and international police advisors are also conducting weeklong seminars to refresh their unique police skills and the the basic skills of local Iraqi police officers. That program includes training on traffic stops, arrest procedures, first-responder medical aid, radio procedures and reports training. Task force Soldiers worked closely with Tikrit police chiefs to develop the training plan and ensure that officers' schedules are adjusted to accommodate it.

The advisors are also developing a training officer program to give selected Iraqi officers the ability to plan and supervise police skill training in each of the stations across Tikrit.

Beyond basic skills and refresher training, task force officials say there is work being done to overhaul the general operations of the police here.

This month task force members broke ground on projects to remodel all Tikrit area police stations. The finished stations will include better anti-terrorism protection measures, command centers, communications equipment, weapons storage rooms and parking areas.

At the same time the international police advisors have worked to help establish patrol routes and schedules, and to better define the scope and duties of the various police departments in the Tikrit area.

Wanish said there is an expectation that terrorists will try to disrupt the late January elections, but he also knows security forces are prepared for them.

"You've got to accept that terrorists are going to attack," he said. "We will be ready. The election is going to happen. That's what we tell people every day. The police and the ING are ready"

